

U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer, whose district includes northern Prince George's County, presented the county State's Attorney's Office with a check for \$260,000 to combat illegal gun activity and gangs in a ceremony Monday at the Laurel Municipal Center.

Law enforcement officials are increasingly concerned about the growing number of gangs in the county. At the end of last year, county officials estimated that 50 gangs were operating in Prince George's, with the most violent and fastest-growing being MS-13, Mara Salvatrucha, a notorious international gang of El Salvadoran origin.

"We must combat the scourge of gangs in our communities," Hoyer said Monday. "Our area has seen a surge in the level of gang activity, but it is a problem throughout the country."

There are an estimated 800,000 gang members nationwide, with more than 10,000 belonging to MS-13, according to law enforcement figures.

Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn Ivey wants to use the federal funds to focus specifically on Latino gangs, whom he said have been linked to a number of homicides and other violent crimes in the county.

"It's clear that we need a strong partnership between the federal, state and local government to fight this gang problem," Ivey said.

According to Ivey, \$200,000 will be used to hire a crime analyst and a bilingual investigator for his department's Violent Crimes Unit.

"Many of the victims and witnesses needed to prosecute Latino gang cases do not speak English," Ivey said.

The bilingual investigator would also be used to translate documents, and develop relationships with Spanish-speaking informants, he said.

The crime analyst would be hired to track gang- related cases, analyze the different factions and their impact on the county, and come up with ways to reduce gang activity in the area.

The remainder of the funds would be used by Ivey's office to train its Guns Prosecution Unit in collecting and working with data to reduce illegal gun activity in Prince George's.

According to Ivey, guns were involved in 85 percent of the 173 homicides committed in the county last year.

Describing the federal funds to the county as "good pork," Hoyer said, "These funds will help improve the quality of life in Prince George's County by reducing access to deadly firearms and stifling gang activity.

"We'll send a clear message that guns and violence will not be tolerated in Prince George's County."

Referring to proposed federal budget cuts to many law enforcement programs, Mayor Craig Moe thanked Hoyer for securing the funds and praised his efforts to get some of those funds restored.

"We know you're doing what you can, " Moe said. "This money will go a long way to decrease gangs and guns on the streets. When we work together like this, nothing is impossible."